



Norwalk-Like Viruses

Health Education Facts

HOW COMMON ARE NORWALK-LIKE VIRUSES?

Only the common cold is reported more frequently than viral gastroenteritis as a cause of illness in the United States. Although viral gastroenteritis is caused by a number of viruses, it is estimated that Norwalk-like viruses are responsible for about 1/3 of the cases in those over 2 years of age. Norwalk-like viruses are increasingly being recognized as a leading cause of foodborne disease. Though first discovered in 1972, it wasn't until the viruses were cloned in 1990 that researchers were able to study them.

HOW ARE NORWALK-LIKE VIRUSES TRANSMITTED?

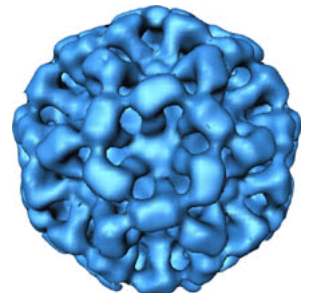
Norwalk-like gastroenteritis is usually transmitted via hands inadequately washed after toileting. The virus is then transferred to food or water. Secondary person-to-person transmission has been documented. Water is the most common source of outbreaks and may include water from municipal water supplies, wells, recreational lakes, swimming pools and water stored aboard ships. Shellfish and salad ingredients are the foods most often implicated in Norwalk-like outbreaks. Ingestion of raw or insufficiently steamed clams and oysters poses a high risk for infection. Foods other than shellfish are contaminated by ill food handlers.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

A mild and brief illness usually develops 24-48 hours after contaminated food or water is consumed and lasts for 24-60 hours. The disease is self-limiting, mild and characterized by nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. Headache and low-grade fever may occur. Severe illness or hospitalization is very rare. Person-to-person transmission can occur up to 7 days after an affected person has stopped having symptoms.

SOME TIPS FOR PREVENTING NORWALK-LIKE VIRUS INFECTION

- Wash hands with soap and warm water after toilet visits and before preparing or eating food
- Cook all shellfish thoroughly before eating
- Wash raw vegetables before eating
- Food handlers with symptoms of Norwalk-like viruses should not prepare or touch food



**Norwalk Virus Electron
Micrograph**